

Gateway Cities Homeless Strategy

Executive Summary

Background

In July 2008, the Gateway Cities Council of Governments (GCCOG), in partnership with PATH Partners and Corporation For Supportive Housing, with the support of the County of Los Angeles, launched a region-wide effort to address homelessness among the 27 cities and the County unincorporated areas in its region. The goal of the initiative, known as the **Gateway Cities Homeless Strategy**, is to develop a community-driven, practical strategy that will effectively respond to and reduce the number of homeless persons in the GCCOG region.

In the span of eight months, PATH Partners performed a broad assessment of resources in the GCCOG region, which includes obtaining an inventory of existing services and housing, identifying underserved groups and sub-regions, engaging city and community stakeholders, exploring existing funding allocations and developing community education and engagement strategies.

The findings gathered through the process have resulted in a set of “Guiding Principles” which embody the values of the Gateway Cities and express their desired goals for creating services and approaches that effectively respond to homelessness in their cities:

- Locally-driven: Solutions that are developed with local expertise, planning and oversight
- Multi-sector: Engages stakeholders from different sectors of the community
- Outcomes: Results-based efforts to address homelessness
- Partnerships: Foster creative and strategic partnerships and alliances

These principles have provided the essential framework for developing a multi-sector, regional strategy for the GCCOG, and will continue to guide cities and community stakeholders in their future planning and implementation efforts.

With guidance from the GCCOG, PATH Partners divided the Gateway cities into four Local Planning Areas (LPA’s) to facilitate the presentation of data and the collection of community feedback, and to begin the community engagement process. The four LPA groups are comprised of the following cities:

- LPA 1: Bell, Bell Gardens, Commerce, Cudahy, Huntington Park, Lynwood, Maywood, South Gate, Vernon
- LPA 2: Avalon, La Mirada, Montebello, Pico Rivera, Santa Fe Springs, Whittier
- LPA 3: Artesia, Bellflower, Cerritos, Compton, Downey, Norwalk, Paramount
- LPA 4: Hawaiian Gardens, Lakewood, Long Beach, Signal Hill

Multiple meetings were held with city and community stakeholders in the four groups to identify and rank the priority service and housing needs in each group. Additionally, the initiative gathered stakeholder feedback on existing homeless services, gaps, under-served regions and sub-groups, and opportunities/challenges through a community survey, key informant interviews, focus groups, and community meetings. The responses and findings

from city and community stakeholders helped to inform and determine the priority areas and actions recommended in the Gateway Cities Homeless Strategy.

The Gateway Cities Homeless Strategy:

Engaging the Community and Integrating Services on the Local Level

There were two prevailing themes that city and community stakeholders voiced strongly throughout the community engagement process of this initiative, themes that were commonly expressed and passionately articulated through planning meetings, surveys, interviews and focus groups.

The first theme was that in order for local or regional efforts to succeed, **everyone has to get involved and play a part in addressing homelessness**. Further education is needed to show how each individual, community sector, and city has a vested interest and responsibility to help end homelessness, which will result in a greater quality of life for homeless persons and the overall community.

The second theme is that cities and stakeholders overwhelmingly agree that current efforts are not well coordinated and that **there is a great opportunity, and a great necessity, for diverse sectors of the community to coordinate and collaborate more effectively on solutions to homelessness as well as on accessing additional resources**. This coordination and collaboration should take place on multiple levels, including: cities with other cities, cities with the County, and cities with diverse sectors in their communities, including businesses, service providers, faith groups and residents.

Based on these priorities, an effective strategy for the GCCOG region needs to have very strong community engagement components which will ensure that the strategy has the necessary community “buy-in” to launch new efforts and actions, and the required support to sustain on-going programs and expansions in communities.

The strategy is comprised of recommended actions which fall into four main categories:

- LEAD – actions aimed at building the necessary regional leadership to oversee the coordination, engagement, collaboration and implementation of the strategy.
- ENGAGE – actions that involve various sectors of the community to foster community support and “buy-in” for strategy and efforts.
- COLLABORATE – actions aimed at getting stakeholders to work together to reach common actions and goals.
- IMPLEMENT – actions which describe actual programs and approaches of the strategy that will directly serve the needs of homeless people in the community.

The first three categories (LEAD, ENGAGE and COLLABORATE) provide recommended actions that will build the leadership and infrastructure required to plan, develop and successfully start up the proposed programs and services presented in the IMPLEMENTATION category of the strategy.

LEAD

1. **Identify a current or new regional leadership entity:** This entity will oversee the coordination, engagement, collaboration and implementation of the strategy. The entity will also represent the region in federal, state and local policy and planning efforts as well as advocate for additional funding resources to sustain the strategy's planning and implementation efforts.
2. **Designate a "Homeless Liaison" for each city:** Each Gateway city will assign a "Homeless Liaison" position, either a new or an existing staff person, who will be the point person for homeless planning and implementation efforts in their city. The position will be the liaison between the leadership entity and the individual cities for all issues related to services and housing for the homeless.

ENGAGE

3. **Form a stakeholder regional homeless alliance:** The alliance, consisting of stakeholders from multiple sectors of the community (including but not limited to businesses, faith groups, law enforcement, providers, city officials, housing developers, residents and homeless individuals), will assist in coordinating local efforts, developing new programs and advising the leadership entity in the planning issues.
4. **Implement "Connections" strategies to engage the community:** The strategy will incorporate actions to encourage strong community participation among all stakeholders in addressing homelessness. This includes local stakeholder groups to assist in planning any local homeless initiatives. Connecting stakeholders to the initiative paves the way for increased support for homeless services and housing developments.
5. **Develop a public education campaign:** A public education campaign will be implemented to effectively communicate what will be accomplished through the strategy and how the community will see visible, measurable outcomes in helping people transition off the streets. The campaign will also help debunk stereotypes about who homeless people are, and emphasize how addressing homelessness results in improved quality of life and safer cities for everyone.

COLLABORATE

6. **Enhance government-wide collaboration:** Greater governmental collaboration among the region will be established to leverage and increase public funding and resources. Partnerships will be strengthened on several levels, including: inter- and intra-departmental city partnerships, partnerships between different cities, and partnerships between Gateway cities and Los Angeles County. Some potential opportunities that may be explored for collaboration include:
 - a. Leverage the already committed \$1.2 million of County HPI funds to secure matching dollars from within the region.
 - b. Explore opportunities to secure funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (President's Stimulus Package funds). New funds will be made available to Gateway cities in several areas, including: homeless prevention, Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) funds, Section 8, HOME funds, CSBG

and neighborhood stabilization.

c. Organize and coordinate the GCCOG cities to apply for additional funding as multi-city collaborations are more competitive.

7. **Implement a region-wide, multi-sector homeless collaborative event:** The strategy will include an annual event that integrates services and resources across agencies and departments, including government departments, service providers, faith groups and the business community. One example of an effective event that has produced demonstrated results in several communities are “homeless connect days”. The County of Los Angeles currently sponsors events that brings together hundreds of volunteers to engage homeless people and connect them to needed services all on one day,. This model event has been replicated in multiple cities across the nation, and has engaged thousands of volunteers and assisted thousands of homeless individuals in connecting to essential services.

IMPLEMENT

Four implementation actions are proposed as part of the Gateway Cities Homeless Strategy, which are Homeless Prevention Services, First Responders Program, Interim Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing. These areas, although listed below as separate items with distinct goals and outcomes, are all very closely intertwined and form a mini-“homeless strategy” in a locality or region that effectively assists homeless individuals and families to move from the streets into housing and long-term independence.

Ideally, it would be recommended that each of the LPA groups of the GCCOG region would implement programs in all four areas. However, given the realities of funding limitations and varying degrees of political and community will, it is expected that local cities will determine the best approaches for their own cities. Some cities may choose to begin with implementing a First Responders Program, while other cities may start with enhancing the Interim Housing beds in their city. As cities gradually begin to build their own capacity to assist the homeless, they will be able to expand upon their existing services as more funding, political will and community will becomes available.

8. **Homeless Prevention Services:** There is a dramatically increasing need for homeless prevention services within the GCCOG to assist families and individuals who are on the brink of losing their houses and becoming homeless. One of the most effective approaches of alleviating the growing homelessness crisis is to prevent evictions from occurring. The overarching goals of homeless prevention services are to prevent the immediate threat of eviction and stabilize families over time to reduce the risk of homelessness. Some prevention services include: rental subsidies, utilities assistance and eviction prevention programs.

The GCCOG region will create a minimum of 2 new homeless prevention programs over the next 12 months to provide prevention services to the homeless in the Gateway Cities. A target goal is to have a total of 4 programs formed (one in each of the four group areas of the GCCOG region), over the next 3-5 years to provide accessible prevention services to those in need. Each homeless prevention program will serve 500 unduplicated individuals annually, providing screening and assessments, prevention programs and housing assistance.

- 9. First Responders Program:** This action will form geographic-based street outreach team(s) that serve as “first responders” and coordinate with local law enforcement, service providers, hospitals, businesses and others who have contact with homeless persons. Teams would be comprised of staff and/or volunteers, and would be multi-disciplinary, utilizing staff from existing mental health providers, substance abuse treatment providers, county agencies, and faith groups.

The GCCOG region will create a minimum of 2 new outreach teams over the next 12 months to provide outreach services to the Gateway Cities. A target goal is to have a total of 4 teams operating (one in each of the four group areas of the GCCOG) over the next 3-5 years to provide more accessible outreach services. Each outreach team will engage 80 new unduplicated homeless individuals and assist them in connecting to services annually.

- 10. Interim Housing:** Develop a strategy to “rapidly re-house” individuals into interim (temporary) housing, with the end goal of long-term housing. This approach, will be linked to street outreach teams, and will focus on intensive housing and placement assistance at the beginning of a client’s entry into interim housing, and will include linkages to housing subsidies, rental assistance programs and other supportive services. Cities/communities would place special emphasis on connecting existing interim beds and programs to street outreach, homeless prevention services, permanent supportive housing and other supportive services to ensure that homeless individuals and families access the full range of resources they need to secure and maintain long-term housing.

The GCCOG region will create a minimum of 2 new interim housing programs (30-40 beds per program) over the next 12 months to provide interim housing for the homeless. A target goal is to have a total of 4 new interim housing programs (one in each of the four group areas in the GCCOG region) over the next 3-5 years to provide housing for people in need. Each new program will serve 100 unduplicated homeless individuals annually, providing them with housing, case management and assistance in connecting to long-term housing opportunities and supportive services.

- 11. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH):** Create and implement a multi-year plan to increase the stock of PSH units in the GCCOG region. A proposed goal for the total GCCOG region is to invest in the creation of 665 units of PSH over the next five years (2010 to 2014). **The production goal of 665 new units will double the number of available supportive housing units that are currently available in the region.** The goal is based on an assessment of the available funding resources the GCCOG will be able to realistically access to support the creation of new PSH units. The breakdown of the 665 unit production goal over five-years includes: one 40 unit development in Year 1, 175 units of smaller PSH projects and set aside units, and 450 scattered-site leasing units.

Additionally, a plan will be developed for acquiring further rental vouchers and/or creating more subsidized housing in the region for homeless families and single adults who do not require supportive housing but do require affordable housing in order to end their homelessness as they transition out of interim housing.